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OPEN HEARTS

VOLUME 24 NUMBER 2 MARCH 2011

The song says, "What the world needs now is love" but we know that it is not a matter of how we feel—it's how we live.

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Lutheran Woman Today (ISSN 0896-209X), a magazine for growth in faith and mission, is published 10 times a year by Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America in partnership with Augsburg Fortress (Box 1209, Minneapolis, MN 55440). *Lutheran Woman Today* editorial offices are at 8765 W. Higgins Rd., Chicago, IL 60631-4189. Copyright © 2010 Women of the ELCA. All rights reserved. Duplication in whole or in part in any form is prohibited without written permission from the publisher. Printed in U.S.A. Periodicals postage paid at Minneapolis, Minn., and additional mailing offices. Annual subscriptions: \$12.00; outside North America add \$8 for postage. Single copies, \$2.50. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *Lutheran Woman Today*, Augsburg Fortress, Publishers, Box 1553, Minneapolis, MN 55440-8730.



VOICES

Open Hearts

by Terri Lackey

A friend gave me her

catalog from the Feel Good Store. I think she gave it to me, not for the merchandise that made me blush, but for the old-age remedies it sells, like soothing wraps for my thumbs and hosiery that fights varicose veins.

I did find one intriguing item in light of our Bible study session this month: LovRub. I won't elaborate on its advertised uses, but suffice it to say, if only "loving relationships" were so easy. I wish that all I had to do to become more tolerant of my neighbor was to dab on a little LovRub. But alas, it will take more than that to open my heart to those with whom I don't see eye-to-eye. The articles in this issue call me to task for that judgmental behavior and encourage me to be more charitable. And it's likely I am not the only one with a critical heart.

In "Judge Not," E. Louise Williams writes, "the judgmental spirit is alive and well in the land. ... It takes up residence in our own hearts" and finds "expression in our words and actions."

Williams claims we are judgmental because of our expectations of how others should behave. "Usually behind our judgments of other people is a value ... about how people are to be and to behave," she continues.

God's people are called not to be judgmental, but to be loving, our Bible study authors write, and the March session examines what it means to love others the way God loves us. Loving others as God loves is powerful, writes Lynn Ramshaw in "Freedom for Love."

"Here is what we need to remember: You and I and every other person on the earth are created and known and loved by God. God's nature is love (1 John 4:8). And this same God calls and empowers us to be extensions of that love. That is our only power."

In our previous issue, we began a new column, Family Matters, and introduced you to the Rev. Sue Gamelin, one of two writers who will share responsibility for the column. This month, you will meet the Rev. Elyse Nelson Winger, mother of two elementary-age children.

Elyse is attempting to instill in her children hearts that are thankful and open to others. And she is using meal time to do that. A recent trip to Zambia reminded Elyse of her abundance, especially at table. She plans to reclaim "meal time as a hallowed time of conversation and fun and as a training ground in thankfulness. God has given us to one another to be in relationship, to see God through one another's eyes."

The season of Lent begins this month and it is a good time to examine our relationships—with others and with God. Julie A. Kanarr, in "Lenten Disciple-ing" says that for Lutherans, the "true measure of a Lenten discipline rests in whether it serves to deepen our relationship with God and help us more effectively serve our neighbor in Christ's name."

This year, let us choose Lenten disciplines that do both. 🌿

Terri Lackey is managing editor of *Lutheran Woman Today*.



GIVE US THIS DAY

The Real Story

by Jeffrey Loudon

It happened long ago, when I was a seminarian, on a trip to Minot, N.D. We stopped at a country church, a real country church, in the middle of a cornfield. It was the end of fall. The wind whispered through the stalks. The doors were unlocked. I walked in, and there the large Bible was opened to Psalm 145. “The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love” (v. 8).

My life as a pastor in some sense has been marked, shaped, and haunted by that text. It recurs throughout Scripture, a theme of the Old Testament.

I thought of it again last fall, when a religion reporter called me up and wanted to know what effect the ELCA churchwide assembly’s vote on the ordination and ministry of gay and lesbian people had had on our parish. She wanted something *juicy*, something about how many people had left the congregation, how the vote had split the parish, how conflict had erupted—something that would sell papers.

I listened, and then gently but firmly said, “The real story is that no one has left. For us it has not been divisive. We think its time to move on, in fact long past time to move on, to other things to which God calls us and which the world needs.”

Well, she didn’t write about *that*; instead she highlighted another congregation, one that did fracture because of the vote.

I have wondered why my little parish did not split. I think the reason is that

they are kind and merciful, slow to anger and, yes, abounding in steadfast love.

I came to them as a pastor who wondered if there were *any* kind and loving parishes out there, although I wouldn’t have framed it like that at the time. I came to them as one who was unsure, even after 25 years of service, if I could ever serve again. In fact, I had taken two years off, just to consider my future, my calling, or as the monks say, to “recollect” who and whose I am.

So for a year, I have led them, watched them, and learned to love them, and for a year they have practiced kindness and mercy not only toward others, but toward themselves and toward me and my daughter.

The church I serve is round, so we all can see each other. We can’t hide. The acoustics are great, so we all can hear each other, on key and off. We are at the intersection of two major streets in downtown Salt Lake City, at a crossroads of the urban core.

This parish didn’t split because we are called together by the gospel...centered in its love, which is more and more spelled out in the words *mercy and kindness and slow to anger*. It is the practice of these attributes, God’s and now ours, that binds us to the center. And I, for one, am grateful to have experienced them again. 🌸

The Rev. Jeffrey Loudon was the interim pastor of Mt. Tabor Lutheran in Salt Lake City from October 2009 to November 2010. He now serves as interim at St. David’s Episcopal Church in Page, Ariz. He has a wonderful 13-year-old daughter, Emma.

Lenten *Disciple*



ing

by Julie A. Kanarr

When I served my first parish in rural Montana, I frequently went out to lunch with a friend who lived in a neighboring town. One spring day, we were at our usual café. My friend said “I’ll have a hamburger.” The waitress replied, “No, you won’t. You’ll have the tuna melt.” I was startled, but quickly recognized what was going on. My friend, a devout Roman Catholic, had forgotten it was Friday. Then the waitress looked at me, shrugged, and said, “You’re Lutheran. Order whatever you want.”

The waitress was right. Lutherans approach keeping Lent with a spirit of freedom and flexibility. Lutherans have often received mixed messages about Lenten disciplines, leading us to simultaneously embrace them and be wary of them. As spiritual heirs of Martin Luther, our theological radar is set to detect and guard against anything that might smack of salvation by works. Salvation by works is the idea that if we perform certain tasks, or a specified set of prayers or other devotional acts, God will be pleased and reward our efforts with salvation.

But sometimes, awareness of our Reformation heritage and Luther’s struggle against the abuses of the medieval church can predispose us toward an almost automatic dismissal of anything that seems to be “too Catholic.” Unfortunately, such wariness can prevent us from embracing or adapting some faithful, theologically sound practices that our ecumenical friends have found meaningful. For Lutherans, the true measure of a Lenten discipline rests in whether it serves to deepen

our relationship with God and help us more effectively serve our neighbor in Christ’s name—not in who else may or may not be doing it.

Not about punishment

Hearing the words *Lenten discipline* can evoke a combination of curiosity and anxiety. I have had confirmation students who, having heard others talk about giving up something (such as chocolate) for Lent, ask me with a mixture of puzzlement and fascination, “How could anyone do that? Why would anyone do that?” Sometimes they even ask, “*Should I do that?*” The word *discipline* might suggest thoughts of school children being sent to the principal’s office, an unpleasant experience designed to change behavior. But in its deeper sense, discipline is not really about punishment. It is more about *disciple-ing*: being formed as a disciple, which involves learning, practice, and commitment in order to change and grow in one’s call to follow Jesus.

The liturgy for the Ash Wednesday service includes the following exhortation: “As disciples of Jesus, we are called to a discipline that contends against evil and resists whatever leads us away from love of God and neighbor.” Worshipers receive an invitation to embrace “the discipline of Lent—self examination and repentance, prayer and fasting, sacrificial giving and works of love—strengthened by the gifts of word and sacrament.” (*Evangelical Lutheran Worship, Leader’s Edition*, page 617).

Freedom and flexibility

Lenten disciplines serve to draw us more deeply into celebrating Christ’s death and resurrection and living out our baptismal calling as Christ’s followers. Given this, we are free to consider a variety of practices in order to create a meaningful Lenten discipline. We can approach Lenten disciplines with freedom and flexibility. True discipline is internally chosen, not externally

imposed, although some honest conversation with a trusted confidante might help you identify a particular discipline to adopt.

You may wish to choose one thing as the focal point of your Lenten discipline, instead of trying to do a total spiritual makeover. Lent can also be time for exploration, for trying on something new, for practicing your discipleship in a fresh way. You might choose to practice in yourself the characteristics that you wish to find in others (such as forgiveness, generosity, or patience).

Some may see the 40 days of Lent as an opportunity to establish new habits or an incentive to resurrect a failed New Year's resolution. Caring for your body

Let your Lenten discipline prompt questions for your ongoing reflection.

and nurturing your relationships are important for embracing your identity as a beloved child of God, and may become central to your Lenten discipline. For someone who neglects to take good care of herself, a Lenten discipline that focuses on self-care as a recognition of one's value in God's eyes can be truly life-giving. But don't be tempted to reduce Lenten discipline to a six-week physical or emotional self-improvement project. To avoid such a trap, ask yourself: What are the spiritual dimensions of this particular Lenten discipline for me? How do I hope that adopting a particular Lenten discipline will help me deepen my relationship with God, guide me in serving my neighbor, and uphold me in Christian community?

Connect to community

Lent is a good time to deepen your study of the Scripture, alone and with others. You might begin or renew a practice of daily Bible reading and prayer. You might choose to spend time studying the Scripture texts for the previous or upcoming Sundays. You

could choose one or more Lenten hymns and let them become the basis of your daily prayer.

Find out what your congregation is doing for Lent and ask yourself how you can strengthen the connection between your personal Lenten discipline and your congregation's. How might your Lenten discipline deepen your participation in worship? Many congregations have a practice of gathering for simple suppers (such as soup and bread) and midweek prayer services during Lent. This is a time for fellowship, shared reflection, and devotion as well as solidarity with the hungry. Many congregations also simplify the liturgy of their Sunday worship, fasting from alleluias and exuberant praise, choosing to focus more intently on repentance, confession, forgiveness, journeying with Christ on the way to the cross, and using "go in peace, remember the poor"

as the dismissal.

Following a Lenten discipline is not something that someone else can do *for* you, vigilant small-town waitresses notwithstanding. But others can do it *with* you. Many find it beneficial to participate in shared disciplines within a Christian community. If you choose to practice a Lenten discipline, consider what kind of support you will need from others. Some may benefit from having others help them stick to their chosen discipline, while others would rather be privately internally motivated, so that they don't feel pressured.

Be wary of potential pitfalls: Don't turn shared Lenten disciplines into an unhealthy competition or a game of spiritual one-upmanship between you and others. And don't let your Lenten discipline become a grim test of endurance, where what you have given up becomes an all-consuming passion, or where you have set yourself up to fail by making impossible demands of yourself. And remember that there is no sin, guilt, shame, or embarrassment in slipping up. Your salvation is not at stake!

erving, not suffering

Classic Lenten disciplines such as fasting, prayer, and almsgiving focus on identifying with Christ's suffering in the cross through personal actions of devotion or deprivation. The ancient practice of abstaining from meat on Fridays is rooted in this idea. Given this, one might ask whether such acts as giving up chocolate trivializes the practice of mirroring Christ's suffering. If you are planning to give something up for Lent, reflect on your motivation and the personal meaning for your choice. Will this be too easy for you? Will it be too difficult? Is this a form of repentance—of turning toward God? Are you trying to let go of a bad habit, so that you might become a better steward of the gifts God has entrusted to you? Is this only a trivial deprivation of pleasure or is this a personally meaningful sacrifice for change in your life?

A carefully chosen Lenten discipline leads us to focus on our call to love God and serve our neighbors. Honest reflection can help us see how some disciplines can be more about serving than suffering. For instance, instead of giving up chocolate to identify with Christ's sufferings through personal deprivation, you might give up desserts so that you can donate what you would have otherwise spent on treats to help those who are hungry, whether through the ELCA World Hunger Appeal or your local food bank.

Consider Lenten disciplines that combine saying no to one thing (such as watching television or going to the movies) in order to say yes to something else (such as Bible study, prayer, volunteering, building relationships with family). And ask yourself what that yes means for you.

Changing your leisure habits? How will you use your newfound time to serve God and neighbor? Changing your eating habits? How does this change your awareness of how God provides you with daily bread and the relationship between the food on your plate and God's command to be caretakers of the land,

ocean, and air, and to care for our hungry neighbors? Changing your spending habits? How does that deepen your understanding and practice of stewardship?

Reflect and write

Let your Lenten discipline prompt questions for your ongoing reflection. To ask questions of meaning and purpose is a classic Lutheran practice, growing out of the "what does this mean" question repeatedly asked throughout Luther's Small Catechism. You may wish to keep a personal Lenten journal to record your thoughts, questions, prayers, struggles and reflections as you journey through Lent. A journal does not need to be fancy. It doesn't even need to consist of complete paragraphs. Don't worry about your writing ability. Some might find it easier to draw or write down words or phrases instead of complete sentences.

As Lent draws to a close, spend time reflecting on questions such as: What have I discovered? What has this meant for me? How have I grown in my appreciation of God's grace? How has this discipline of Lent engaged me in repentance, in prayer, in living out my faith, in serving my neighbor? And finally, where might this lead me in keeping Lent next year?

Lenten disciplines come to us with an invitation, but not a demand, and certainly not with watchful waitresses to tell us what we can and cannot do. Remember that God won't love you more if you practice a Lenten discipline or love you less if you don't. As we enter into the season of Lent, let us do so both with discipline and freedom, purpose and flexibility. Lent invites us to reflect deeply upon the gift of God's grace.

Lent is a time for renewal, a time to focus on the gift of Christ's death and resurrection, and to grow in our understanding of living as God's beloved children. May your Lent be blessed. ☞

The Rev. Julie A. Kanarr serves as co-pastor of Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Port Angeles, Wash.



FAMILY MATTERS

Given to One Another

by Elyse Nelson Winger

I'm flying over Africa, high in the sky with in-flight entertainment and in-flight shopping at my fingertips. I look at the glossy catalog pages advertising cosmetics, jewelry, and gadgets galore: little nothings on which I could spend so many dollars. The perfume is especially intriguing, with names like "Allure" and "Guilty," "Love" and "Lady Million." Milliliters of fragrance sell for big money because they're not just selling scent. They are selling dreams and personality. They're selling admiration, attention, love.

I'm flying over Africa and as I peruse these pages of perfume, I'm not seeing the beautiful bottles of fragrances for \$50. Instead, I see 235,000 Zambian kwacha, nearly half a typical monthly salary for a Zambian worker. I see fathers and mothers, aunts and uncles, grandmothers and friends raising children left orphaned by HIV and AIDS, and who are struggling to feed their families and provide decent housing. I see Soweto Market, deep in the heart of Lusaka, where women and men sell second-hand clothes and second-hand shoes to the people of their city: \$20 for a used pair of shoes for which we'd only pay \$3 at a thrift store. I see trained teachers and pastors whose salaries can't begin to pay the costs of college for their children in a country where financial aid is a fantasy. And I burn at the injustice of it. But I'm flying over Africa and if I wanted, I could flash my credit card and do a little in-flight shopping because, after all, it's just \$50.

Do you remember when your mother, or someone else's mother, told you to clean your plate because there are hungry children in Africa? Like we were going to scoop lima beans off our mashed potatoes, smeared plates and mail them somewhere. Like eating all of our dinner was somehow going to help the hungry kids on a far-away continent whose lives we couldn't begin to imagine since we had never experienced hunger before.

I confess that I never appreciated the gratitude lesson that was intended via the admonition to eat our beans. As I grew older, I mocked such commands as coercive and paternalistic. But now, having been on a vision trip to Zambia on behalf of my congregation, I can hear the following words coming out of my mouth: "Please finish your plate. I know you don't like the salad dressing, but it's all good for you. And don't you know how good we have it? How easy? How healthy? How safe? There are hungry kids in Zambia. And most of them are lucky to get two servings of *nsima* (corn meal porridge) a day. So please. Eat your salad!" I'm wondering how that will go over with my children. Probably not as well I hope it would—for all the same reasons my generation wasn't motivated by the lima beans speech. But the mother in me can't help it. I'm flying over Africa and I want to reset the way I engage my children about money and meals. And I know it's going to take more than an admonition to finish a salad to get there.

As I ate with families and members of Lutheran congregations in Zambia

I heard women give thanks for the porridge that filled their children's bellies for today. I saw God through their eyes, a God whom they trusted would, in the poetry of the psalmist, "give them their meat in due season."

Many times over, I heard prayers of gratitude for creation and for daily bread. Their thankfulness moved me. But I also felt convicted, for I remembered my own careless prayers before plates of amazing abundance. I thought of the ways I obsess about food and stress about my over-consumption of it. I lamented the ways we rush through dinner in order to rush to the next lesson or practice. And I kept returning to one of Gandhi's most famous statements: "There is enough in the world for everybody's need, but not enough for anybody's greed." The gospel truth of this insight has pierced me anew. The psalmist's promise that God opens a hand to "satisfy the desire of every living thing" feels like a call to repentance and action.

I'm flying over Africa and I am praying that I might receive the gifts of gratitude and generosity shown me in Zambia. I am praying that I might somehow break open my own children's hearts and minds to the presence of God's children on this far-away continent. I praying that my children will grow up to give their lives and their talents to voca-



Youth choir at a Lutheran church in Zambia.

tions and relationships that are not marked by what they can take and what they can get, but by what they can give and what they can receive. I am praying that my own heart and hands can be reshaped by God's grace and call. I am remembering that one of the wonderful things about being a parent (in addition to relearning the geometry you've completely forgotten) is that you also get to learn gratitude and generosity again for the first time.

For me, this means reclaiming meal time as a hallowed time of conversation and fun and as a training ground in thankfulness. It means keeping our Sunday school offering on the table as a reminder that what we get is not ultimately our own. It means resisting disembodied admonitions to eat up plates of food and instead set our kitchen island with pictures of the Zambians with whom I ate and prayed, for they are my newest teachers and spiritual

guides. I'm flying over Africa, and those are the only glossy pictures I want to see. They aren't selling a thing. Instead, they're telling and living the story God wants and needs me to hear.

This is most certainly true: God has given us to one another to be in relationship, to see God through one another's eyes. And so I wonder, dear readers and fellow mothers: Whose stories and witness are ready to join your family table? How is mealtime a training ground for gratitude and generosity in your home? 🌿

The Rev. Elyse Nelson Winger serves as associate pastor for Worship Arts and Mission at St. John's Lutheran Church in Bloomington, Ill. She and husband, Stewart, have studied, lived, and worked in Chicago, Egypt, the Detroit metro area, and now central Illinois. Their two children, Catherine and Daniel, are in the delightful elementary-school years filled with studying, church, music, and sports.




You Gotta Love 'Em

by Kathie Bender Schwich

A friend once shared this description with me, and I regret that I don't recall the name of its original author: "When a man and a woman decide it's time for bed, the man gets up from the couch and goes into the bedroom and gets into bed. The woman gets up from the couch, turns

off the television, and clears the snack dishes that her husband and kids have used earlier in the evening. She then goes into the kitchen and puts those dishes and the dirty dishes that someone else left on the counter into the dishwasher. While at it, she puts the box of cereal that was left on the kitchen table back into the cabinet. She then goes into the bathroom and picks up the dirty socks and that have been left on the floor and places them in the laundry hamper. She also grabs the wet towel off of the vanity and hangs it on the rack where it belongs. Finally, she refills the dog's empty



water dish, makes sure the back door is closed and locked and the lights are off, and then goes to bed.” And she probably does so muttering her frustration that no one else can see what needs to be done.

Does this scenario sound the least bit familiar?

In her book *Through Strands of Red Hair*, the late Charlotte Abenth, a pastor’s wife and the mother of four boys, expressed her exasperation by creating “a collection of things that a mother gets sick and tired of saying over and over as her children grow up.”

That list includes:

- **“Shut the door.** Will someone *please* shut the door?”
- **“Clear your dishes.”** My sons have carried more dishes from the kitchen, through the family room, down the stairs, across the playroom, and into their bedrooms than they have ever transported from the table to the kitchen sink!
- **“Make your bed** and pick up your room.” They would rather spend 20

minutes tripping over dirty clothes on the floor than take 20 seconds to drop them in the hamper.

“Because it’s *time* for you to go to bed.”

“Hang it up!” There are a dozen hooks on the wall for coats and sweatshirts. The hooks are empty; the clothes are always on the floor.

“Get out of the refrigerator!” Most of the time they don’t take anything out (of the refrigerator). It’s just that every time they walk through the kitchen they feel some sort of obligation to greet the refrigerator by opening it and staring at the contents for a few minutes.

“Now!” They think that now means tomorrow. . . or next week sometime.

- **“You’re going to be late** for school. Will you please get up?!”
- **“Turn it down** or turn it off!” You would think they would notice the guinea pig twitching to the beat of their loud music, or the pictures sliding off the walls!
- **“Will you please put the seat down?”**
- **“I’m not going to say this again.”** That’s really ridiculous. As long as the seat is up, the door is open and the refrigerator light is on; as long as I find jackets on the floor and hear blaring music, I will say it again!

Annoying habits

It is human nature to occasionally (or even regularly) be annoyed by the habits of our loved ones. Each of us is human, so there are times when we all have been guilty of forgetting to pick up our dirty dishes or of putting our laundry in the hamper. But, how many times do these things need to happen before they become sources of major frustration? When we reach a point that we find ourselves saying it over and over again?

And then the bigger question becomes: What do we do with all of that frustration? These are, after all, the people we love and cherish and are blessed to call *family*.

I have tried the tactic of leaving the dirty ice-cream dish on the coffee table, just waiting for the guilty party to realize it’s still there and clean it up himself. But after several days of watching the dish get stickier and dirtier, and feeling my blood pressure get higher and higher, I usually give in and pick it up myself.

When faced with a loved one’s annoying habits, we usually choose among several tactics for dealing with it: We might complain and nag about it, keep quiet and stuff our feelings, or act out in a passive-aggressive way by behaving in an equally annoying fashion. My experience has been that sometimes one approach can follow the other. A person can keep quiet and bite his or her tongue just so many times before she shoots off

frustration with a cacophony of complaints. That often leaves the victims of the tirade wondering what in the world happened because they weren't aware that it even bothered her so much!

Being part of a family or having close friendships is about learning to love others in spite of their frustrating habits and flaws. It is about acknowledging what brought us together as unique individuals complete with bad habits and idiosyncrasies, in the first place. It is about *storge*, one of the four loves mentioned in this month's Bible study.

Storge is about the deep and abiding love of family. It is the overwhelming love one feels at the end of a chaotic day, when the house quiets down and the children are asleep in their beds and all seems well with the family—and the world.

Relationships are not easy

God created us to be in community and in relationship with others. But that does not mean it will always be easy. Being part of human relationships also challenges us to love others unconditionally, just as we are loved unconditionally by our God. In the Bible study this month, we learn that *agape* is another of the four kinds of love mentioned in Scripture. Agape is the unconditional love that God shows us through Jesus. God's love for us is the epitome of patience, understanding, compassion, and mercy.

When you and I are in relationship with another, our ability to show love, patience, understanding, compassion, and mercy is put to the test. You and I can never love one another to the extent that God loves us. We can, however, strive to be more understanding and giving in our love to others as we seek to work together with them in being family.

We are family together when we are able to speak openly and lovingly about those things that annoy us. We can help the "offender" see things from our perspective. We can make an effort to teach our children

that their mother is a person, too, with interests other than just keeping the house clean. If everyone picks up after himself or herself, the workload isn't too great for any one member of the family, and all will be able to enjoy some leisure time as well. Helping to keep the house clean for one another is what it means to be a member of the family.

Through caring conversation, you can help your spouse or partner or child understand what it is that bothers you about his or her habits, and what it would mean to you if he or she stopped doing it. Realizing that no one is perfect—even me or you—this might also be a great time to ask your loved ones what it is in your behavior that makes their life miserable, and then offer to work on changing it!

Abenth completes her list of things she gets tired of saying over and over again by adding, "after our youngest son leaves home, I will have to watch myself lest my husband comes home and finds me in tears because there are no muddy tracks on the floor, and no dirty dishes in the living room, and no water left running... I know the day will come when I will wish with all my heart that I had a reason to say those things just one more time."

During those times when it isn't easy to deal with the annoying habits of a loved one, I thank God for God's never failing, limitless love for me (with all of my faults) and pray for wisdom to see how my behaviors might be a source of frustration for others.

I also pray for patience and compassion as well as a bit of humor so that I can deal lovingly with the behaviors of others that irritate me so much.

Tonight as I head to bed, gathering dirty dishes as I go, I will thank God for blessing me with the gift of a family that loves me so deeply, and for their willingness to tolerate my annoying habits. 🌸

The Rev. Kathie Bender Schwich serves as vice president for mission and spiritual care at Advocate Lutheran General Hospital, Park Ridge, Ill.



LET US PRAY

The Rabbi's Gift

by Julie K. Ageson

I can think of no better

way to illustrate the theme of this month's study on loving relationships than a story of one community's yearning for new life. Here it is retold from my memory:

In an isolated monastery in a far-off place, the monks and their abbot had lived together a long time. They were old, set in their ways, fearful and crotchety. Their small community was dying. No one new came to the monastery and the old monks were tired, afraid, and critical of one another. One day the abbot learned that a wise rabbi had come to a small hermitage in the forest near the monastery. At the urging of his fellow monks, he decided to visit the rabbi. Perhaps this wise rabbi would be able to help them save their dying community?

So the abbot set off through the forest and at last came to a hut where the rabbi was staying. After a lengthy visit, the abbot prepared to leave, but at the door, he asked for advice. "Our community is dying," he said bluntly. "The spirit has gone out of our people. Where is the Messiah?" Upon which the rabbi looked thoughtfully at the old abbot and responded, "The Messiah is in your midst. The Messiah is one of you."

And with this cryptic message, the abbot returned to the monastery to tell his monks the rabbi's strange words. As the abbot told the monks what the rabbi had said, they all began to look at one another. "Surely the abbot is not the Messiah but if anyone comes close, he'd be the one" and "Brother Thomas? He has some Christ-like ways but he's often

surly—it couldn't be him" and "Brother Eldred is quiet and thoughtful but he loses his temper and can be obnoxious" and "Brother Philip is a nobody, passive, boring. But on the other hand, he often helps when no one else will... the rabbi couldn't have meant him, could he?" And finally, each said to himself, "The rabbi surely couldn't have meant *me*, could he?"

Then on the off-chance that the Messiah might be one of them, they began to treat each other differently. And on the off-off-chance that the Messiah might be living in their very midst, they began to look differently at themselves, their community, the world.

Before too much time had passed, people began to come back to the monastery. Younger monks were interested in joining the community and people in outlying areas were drawn to the place. The monastery had become a center of hope, light, and grace. There was a spirit of joy and new life and a sense that God was in this place.

Well, the living God *is* in *our* midst, making God's home among us. When we bear Christ to one another, treating each other and the world we share with compassion and dignity, loving relationships flourish. May this church, our homes, and the communities we're all part of reflect the transforming presence of Christ. God is here! 🌿

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You and I live in the tension between the teachings of Jesus and a culture that does the opposite.

Our political, economic, institutional, and sometimes even family values in which we work, live, raise our children, and grow in Christ seem grounded in competition and the desire—and even need—to win.

Freedom for Love

by Lynn C. Ramshaw

We are taught to accumulate more than our neighbor, to have the best of everything, to win even junior sports events no matter the cost.

The problem of being counter-cultural is as old as our faith. In 1 Corinthians (2:4–5) Paul says that his preaching of the good news was not based on so-called words of wisdom, but on the signs and works of the Holy Spirit. He writes that our faith should rest on the power of God—and not on human wisdom. The difference is that the power we proclaim is *love*, not anything else.

Here is what we need to remember: You and I and every other person on the earth are created and known and loved by God. God's nature is love (1 John 4:8). And this same God calls and empowers us to be extensions of that love. That is our only power.

PERFECT EXPRESSION OF LOVE

We think: "How can we be extensions of God's love? We are only human." But we are not alone in this. Jesus is our teacher and by the Spirit of God he is with us. Sometimes we have trouble separating the perfect human that Jesus is from the perfect God that he is. We think: "No wonder Jesus can do it and we can't. He's God. We are sinful humans with a little spirit thrown in." But here is the truth: While Jesus lived among us he revealed what "perfect human" means. It means a human perfectly open to the love of God pouring through.

In *Jesus, A Portrait*, author Gerald O'Collins identifies three of Jesus' teachings as particularly significant: the Beatitudes, the Lord's Prayer, and the Love Commandment. They not only ask us to do certain things,

they also reveal something of who Jesus is. They reveal how to be faithfully human. When we reflect on these particular teachings, we can discover our own capacity for love.

THE BEATITUDES

The Beatitudes clarify what "Love your neighbor" means as they reveal the kind of person God creates us to be. I'm using a portion of Luke's list here, but all the beatitudes are similarly counter-cultural, not only for Jesus' time but for ours: "... *blessed are you who are poor. . . blessed are you who are hungry. . . blessed are you who weep. . . blessed are you when people hate you. . . exclude you. . . revile you. . .*" (Luke 6:20–22). That describes how Jesus lived. He was poor; he hungered; he wept; he was hated and excluded and reviled. Yet he knew he was blessed.

Living a life of daily bread

by Mikka McCracken



What can you learn about your faith by baking bread? Get out your apron, pull out the flour canister and get to work. You'll learn about living a life of intention and attention. You'll learn some patience. You'll learn to live in wide-eyed anticipation. You'll learn to live in community.

"Give us this day our daily bread" is perhaps one of the simplest, most common phrases used by Christians and Lutherans worldwide. But this short phrase leaves a lot of room for reflection and interpretation.

This petition of the Lord's Prayer has also been the theme of the 2010 Lutheran World Federation (LWF) General Assembly, held July 20–27 in Stuttgart, Germany. You are invited, as the delegates have been doing, to reflect on the phrase "give us this day our daily bread."

There are many meanings to this theme. We could think about daily bread in a spiritual way, as the ritual practice of Holy Communion and the Eucharist, or as anything required for sustenance from day to day. (Much of this work has already been done through the official LWF assembly Bible studies, which are available at www.lwf-assembly.org along with articles, stories and many other resources for study.)

As for my reflection and unpacking of "give us this day our daily bread," I decided to focus on the most basic element of the petition, literal bread. I am a recent college graduate removed from four years of cafeteria food and an on-campus bakery now navigating the wide-open ranges of the grocery store and the kitchen.

What breads do you remember making growing up? What was the first bread you baked?

I am a big fan of cooking shows, but I am not by any stretch of the imagination the most skilled cook. I am proud to report that I do have my first set of real knives, a few cookbooks and a rolling pin, and that I am a baker. Chocolate chip cookies and banana cupcakes are my signature pieces, but only recently did I try to make bread.

I do remember watching and helping my mother bake bread on the large, smooth, cleared space of our kitchen counter when I was young. I remember different types of bread: Christmas stollen, poppy seed bread for Easter morning, rolls for Thanksgiving and foccacia to accompany my favorite dish in the world, spanakopita (Greek spinach pie). I cannot recall much of the preparation and process, though I know my mother put hours into all these beautiful, tasty creations.

Before you get too excited to hear about my first adventure in bread-making, allow me a disclaimer: I made pizza dough for calzones. I know that is not

the most advanced creation, but let's call it my first lesson in Bread Baking 101. A friend of mine at work gave me the recipe a while back, and I finally had an occasion to try it.

The process

I knew I had all the ingredients at home except the yeast, which my boyfriend, Jake, graciously agreed to pick up and bring home. I had it all planned out: I would prepare the dough between arriving home and leaving for my spin class at the local YMCA, let the dough rise during my wonderful workout, rush home to punch it down (which I was really looking forward to), prepare the filling ingredients, bake and feast!

Well, as life goes, I started the whole process a little later than I intended. Jake and the yeast were late to arrive, and you can't start the process without yeast. I felt rushed! I was half changed into workout clothes, half still wearing work clothes. Finally I had bowl, yeast, spoon and recipe in front of me ready to go.

Step 1: Dissolve yeast into 1 cup warm (about 120 degrees Fahrenheit) water until foamy.

That sounded easy. I tested the tap water with my finger and figured it was close enough. I filled the cup, poured the water into the bowl and added my yeast.

How to Use This Resource

This resource can be used by an individual for personal reflection or by a group. Since bread-making is a lost art in some places, use this resource as an opportunity for intergenerational sharing of skills and recipes.

For group use, consider inviting each participant to bring along her favorite bread or bread recipe to share. Set up the room as a circle of chairs with a space for entry or exit after every fourth chair. A display in the center of the circle that features different bread and baking equipment will add an interesting focal point.

This program could easily be made into a half-day, full-day or two-day retreat. Allow time for the group to make bread together. For instance, begin by mixing and kneading bread, and then follow by using this resource while the bread bakes (though it might be hard to concentrate when the wonderful scent starts emanating from the oven!). Finish by eating the warm bread.

For additional resources, turn to www.lwf-assembly.org, where six Bible studies on five words from the fourth petition of the Lord's Prayer are featured: "give," "us," "today," "daily" and "bread." Share one or more of the "daily bread" stories from Bangladesh, Cameroon, Canada, Chile, Germany, Haiti, Iceland, India, Kazakhstan, Nepal, Sudan, Thailand, Australia and the United States. Learn about different kinds of "daily bread" in each of the LWF regions. Expand the content of the retreat by adding in consideration of food security and sovereignty (there's a 24-page PDF on this topic at www.lwf-assembly.org).

Dissolve yeast ... until foamy ... I somehow read that as dump it in and WHIP the yeast into a foamy frenzy.

Picture this: Me, ferociously whisking my water and yeast mixture, trying to get the foam to form, when Jake glances over from his perch and exclaims, "What are you *doing?*!" I tell him I'm waiting for my water and yeast mixture to get foamy. He raises an eyebrow and informs me that I don't look like I'm waiting and that yeast is actually *alive* and that I've probably killed off all my yeast-lings in the process of whipping them into foam. He asks if it says in my recipe to stir. I look, and sure enough, nothing about stirring.

At this point, I am exasperated, because I am running out of time, have wasted a packet of yeast and am not sure if my mixture will now get foamy.

After about 10 minutes of pacing, self-deprecation and at one point throwing myself face down onto the couch to force myself to wait for the non-existent foam, Jake encouraged me to start over.

So I dumped the water and yeast from the first attempt down the drain, saying a little prayer for all the dead yeast-ies that I had killed in my haste. Jake advised me to warm the metal bowl before adding the water and helped me guess at a good temperature, which it turns out was much cooler than the scalding temperature I had started with on my first round.

We dumped the yeast packet in and added a pinch or two of sugar at Jake's advice, because "The yeast need something to eat to do their magic." (Yes, it was at this moment that it occurred to me that the "magic" has to do with the expulsion of gases and other things that the little yeast get from eating the sugars. Yum!) Sure enough, shortly thereafter I started to watch little patches of foam rise to the surface. I stood over the bowl, watching the froth blossom on the water's surface, and thought, "this must be what bread makers' dreams are made of!"

The rest of the process was a breeze. We added the other ingredients, went for a workout and returned to a beautifully risen bulb of dough. After some punching, kneading, rolling and pulling, our calzones were in the oven and devoured before we knew it.

Where do you most often encounter God in your daily life and activities?

Bread-making and the Christian life

The parallels between this—my first official bread-making experience—and Christian life are not lost on me. In fact, I often encounter God in the simplest activities: on a morning run, while singing a particular hymn during church, in the close confidence of a friend, and much to my surprise and joy, here in the making of bread. Here are the lessons I learned.

Lesson 1: Be intentional

I generally have good intentions. I didn't *try* to kill my yeast with a combination of scalding water and whipping to create foam, but I did. To be intentional is to pay attention, to read carefully and to try to understand a situation and the actors in it. If I had intentionally taken the time to learn about yeast, why it needs a special water temperature, the process that takes place and how it is, in fact, alive, perhaps I would have been kinder and less frenzied. I would have understood the dynamics of the process. To live a life of daily bread is to live a life of intention and attention.

Think about a difficult situation in your life. How can you be intentional about your actions in that situation? In what ways can you read carefully and try to understand the actors and dynamics?

Lesson 2: Be patient

In my sprint toward wanting to be successful at making bread, I forgot the spiritual gift of patience (Galatians 5:22). It took a failed attempt to remind me of that. As I stood, wide-eyed, at the rim of my bowl and watched the blossoming froth of yeast, I felt as if I could wait forever just to see the mystery unfold and wonder in anticipation. I think that is what God intended the gift of patience to be like.

Patience often has a negative connotation. For example, I must have patience to endure this long meeting, patience to endure this cold or illness and even patience to let my “oops-I-just-cut-my-hair-too-short” hairstyle grow out. However, no matter the situation, we are called to trust in God, to wait and watch for what unfolds and for the yeast to work. To live a life of daily bread is to know that patience can be a positive experience when we are able to be at peace and encounter everything in wide-eyed anticipation.

What is the “yeast” working in your life? How does it feel to wait and watch, wide-eyed, for what God has planned?

Lesson 3: Be in community with one another

Remember at the beginning of this article when I said that I am a baker? That's true to an extent, but in all honesty, Jake is the real baker and I am more the assistant baker. To create and enjoy daily bread is to make it, bake it and break it with others. Without encouragement, advice and guidance, my bread would

never have made it past the dead-yeast stage. It wasn't my bread that succeeded but our collaboration on our bread that had delicious life and provided nourishment.

Similarly, Christ didn't break bread alone. Bread was shared at a meal with friends. Christ's body wasn't given for personal gain but for the wholeness of the body of Christ, for all of God's creation. To live a life of daily bread is to be in intentional, patient community with one another and with all of creation.

What communities do you belong to? What community collaborations give you life?

Like yeast that a woman took and mixed ...

In the Gospel of Luke, there is a short parable Jesus tells about the kingdom of God. “And again he said, ‘To what should I compare the kingdom of God? It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened’” (Luke 13:20). This is my one story of bread baking, and combined with your stories and reflections, we are the women who mix in our measures of flour to leaven and help raise the communities and the world that we live in.

Please join us and others from the Lutheran World Federation in sharing stories and reflections on daily bread in our Facebook group, “LWF 2010: Give Us Today Our Daily Bread, Reflections from North America.” (You can get the calzone recipe there too! Click on the discussion tab and find the recipe posts.)

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Therefore, he was and is compassionate toward all those who suffer the same things (those who are poor, hungry, grieving, and reviled because they are different). In fact, whenever we remember him, we notice that Jesus is compassionate toward all of us, no matter what our physical or mental health, our worldly success, our sexual preference, or our acceptability. Jesus was extraordinarily humble compared with the rest of us.

In our more prideful behavior, we tend to objectify people who make us uncomfortable. We use labels like “the homeless” or “the addicted” or “the unemployed” or “the mentally ill” or “the disabled” or even “the perverted” as we attempt to de-humanize and control

love your neighbor *as yourself*

them. We refer to such people as “they” or “them” or “those people.” We can be quite judgmental as we distance ourselves. It is how we cover our fear; we dread the thought of being in their shoes. We have no idea who they are. We are not loving toward many of these neighbors, and so, we do not learn from them.

I used to work in a day center for people who have nowhere to sleep at night. Before working there, even in my compassion for their plight, I referred to all who struggle economically and are without homes as “the homeless.” Walking down an urban street, I would avert my eyes when I encountered someone sitting on the sidewalk with a sign pleading for help.

One night after work at the center, driving down the highway toward my home, I saw one of our regular visitors walking along the side of the road. When I first saw him, I thought “there’s a homeless guy.” Then I recognized him. It was Joe.

I knew Joe’s story, how he got there, what prevented him from being able to do much about it. I knew how painful it was for him. And most important of all, I knew his name. He is a person, not the object of pity. And

Jesus is walking with him. To this day, Joe personifies for me “you who are poor and hungry, who weep and are reviled.”

Jesus loves Joe just as much as he loves me. “How might I react differently from now on?” I asked myself.

THE LORD’S PRAYER

If we choose to grow into the people God is creating us to be, we need to begin with prayer. In the profound yet simple prayer Jesus teaches us, the primary significance is opening ourselves to being loved and to learning to truly love in return.

In the Lord’s Prayer we begin by worshipping God; then, we ask for what we need. Remember all the times Jesus went apart to be with his father? In teaching us his prayer, he is telling us what he was doing: worshipping God and asking for what he needed. The key, though, is to then willingly receive the gifts God sends.

“Your will be done” implies *listening* on the part of the one who prays. When he listens, Jesus discerns God’s will. Then Jesus teaches us to ask for our daily bread. The key to receiving it follows: “forgive us, as we forgive others.” Jesus does that, even on the cross. And that part about evil? Jesus understood evil as real; he exorcised demons and prayed to not succumb to temptation. He did not give in to evil in his own life from his resistance to the temptations in the wilderness at the beginning of his ministry to his heartfelt prayer in the garden of Gethsemane at the end. He teaches us to desire the same courage.

To be in the practice of receiving from God means developing the willingness to be changed from self-protective fear and cruel behavior to compassion, from avoiding God to being open to a true encounter. Whereas Jesus wanted transformation, we tend to resist it because it threatens us somehow. And so we fail to grow our love for God or our neighbor.

THE LOVE COMMANDMENT

Then comes the commandment to “... love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’” (Matthew 22:37–39). We already have discovered the inadequacy of our love of neighbor; we simply are often too fearful of difference to be truly loving. Similarly, we sometimes avoid time with God because we are resistant to God’s loving desire to transform us. We need to remember: “There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear . . .” (1 John 4:18).

Hidden in this commandment to love is an important teaching that can begin to heal our fearful resistance. Jesus says to love God and then to “love your neighbor *as yourself*” (italics mine). Rarely do we hear self-love preached or taught, and yet it is essential to learning to be loving toward others. If I do not have love for me, I am incapable of loving anyone else, even God.

Here is what self-love means: loving the person God is tenderly and lovingly creating me to be. It means discovering who that is, delighting in who that is, and sharing who that is. That frees me to love others, including God. I become aware that I do not need to protect myself, nor prove myself, nor become greedy on my own account. That’s what *selfishness* is, in contrast with self-love. It comes from being afraid that I have no value. That I am inadequate. That I do not measure up. That I won’t have enough. Because of God, every one of us has value. We simply need to start where we are and allow God to grow us. That’s when we can accept the invitation to learn from one another on this shared journey toward wholeness.

FREEDOM FOR LOVE

To love is a choice we make. The great feelings follow down the road a bit. Once we make the choice, we have options about how to love. One is to notice

the gifts already given to us and to be guided and empowered by them. Rose Mary Dougherty recently published a wonderful little book called *Discernment, A Path to Spiritual Awakening*. In it she suggests that discernment of God’s desire for us is a universal gift. She says, “we uncover it and nourish it...through the skillful means of noticing, through our prayer, and through our growing openness to God in all of life.”

Primarily, discernment is a habit that can grow in us when we allow it. As we become familiar with noticing God in all things, we then can apply the gift in particular circumstances. Receiving God’s guidance, we more easily recognize God’s voice, even in the tough times.

Then, Dougherty says, “Discernment is ultimately about love. It is about seeing, in the moment, the loving action and the compassionate action that is mine and having the freedom to respond and to act.” It gives us “freedom for love” received and given.

One of the ways of nurturing discernment and therefore “freedom for love” is to pray for others, especially those who trigger our negative reactions. Try this: when you find yourself labeling or fighting or turning away or rejecting someone, hold out your hands as you would in receiving the body of Christ in Eucharist. Imagine the person or persons causing your stress in the palm of your hand, where Jesus’ body would be. Just hold them there in the presence of God who is love. Resist the urge to tell God what you think they need. Just hold them there.

Similarly, when you are avoiding time with God, hold yourself in your open hands. Gently, over time, expect a miracle. We do have the “freedom for love.” It is counter-cultural, but it is the core of our faith. We need to trust it. 🌿

The Rev. Lynn C. Ramshaw is an Episcopal priest, retired; an experienced retreat leader; mother of three and grandmother of seven, awaiting the adoption of her eighth grandchild from the Dominican Republic.



HEALTH WISE

Ending Endometriosis

by Molly M. Ginty

Sara Bastian wanted to scream.

For several days every month, Bastian was in unbearable pain because she had endometriosis, in which menstrual tissue grows outside the womb and bleeds with each monthly period.

"It was like having period cramps plus gastrointestinal cramps while being in labor all at once," says Bastian, 29, a child-care provider in Madison, Wis. "And until I found treatment that worked, I coped by doing a lot of praying—and getting a lot of support from family and friends."

Endometriosis, which affects an estimated 10 percent of women in the United States, can bring fatigue, nausea, and heavy bleeding so intense that women literally pass out. Misplaced endometrial tissue sheds blood that becomes trapped in the pelvis or abdomen with no way to exit the body. This irritates surrounding tissue, causing pain not just with menstruation, but also with sex, urination, and bowel movements.

"The ache can be unbearable, and can continue for years because this disease often goes undiagnosed," says Mary Lou Ballweg, president of the Endometriosis Association. "But during March (Endometriosis Awareness Month), we're working to change that."

What makes endometrial tissue grow outside the womb? Some experts say the cause is genetic, as women with a mother or sister with endometriosis are seven times more likely than average to have it. Some say the problem starts in

uterus, when cells meant to develop in the womb accidentally wind up in the abdominal cavity. Some point to the environment, as exposure to the pollutant dioxin (found in pesticides and herbicides) can raise the risk of endometriosis. Others blame "retrograde menstruation" in which the tissue a woman sheds during her period backs up into the fallopian tubes, enters the pelvic cavity, and then spreads.

"Many believe a combination of these factors can work together to create endometriosis," says Ballweg. "But until we understand what causes this disease and develop a cure that addresses the underlying problem, our best strategy is to promote early diagnosis and available treatments."

How do you know if you have endometriosis? Since it doesn't have visible outward symptoms and is often confused with other conditions, it takes an average of 10 years to diagnose. "This delay can be extremely frustrating for patients," says Dr. David Redwine, an endometriosis surgeon from Bend, Ore. "Mothers, nurses, and doctors tell them, 'Many other women have pain with sex and pain with their periods. What's your problem? You should just learn to live with it.'"

If you suspect you may have endometriosis, experts say your best strategy is to demand that your doctor run every possible diagnostic test. Your physician may perform an ultrasound or take a CA-125 blood test, which detects proteins found in the blood of some women

This ongoing column is part of the Women of the ELCA health initiative, Raising Up Healthy Women and Girls. Visit www.womenoftheelca.org for more information.

with endometriosis. But the most effective diagnostic test is laparoscopy, during which a scope is placed through the bellybutton to look for endometrial tissue in the abdomen, and during which doctors can also treat endometriosis by removing abnormal tissue that they might find.

If you do have endometriosis, early intervention is crucial because over time, blood that is shed by excess endometrial tissue can get trapped in the body and lead to the growth of cysts and scar tissue. Eventually, these scars can bind organs together—even attaching the fallopian tubes to the abdominal wall and causing infertility, which affects 30 to 40 percent of endometriosis patients.

Women with endometriosis need speedy treatment because their condition also puts them at higher risk for a host of other health problems: allergies, asthma, chemical sensitivities, chronic fatigue syndrome, eczema, fibromyalgia, gastrointestinal disorders, hypothyroidism, insulin resistance, lupus, migraines, premature birth, non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, rheumatoid arthritis, and cancers of the breast, thyroid, and ovaries.

The good news is that once endometriosis is treated, the pain it causes—and the health problems it spurs—can be brought under control.

To ease the ache of cramps associated with endometriosis, you can take over-the-counter or prescription painkillers. To reduce endometrial tissue growth and slow or halt menstruation, you can take contraceptive drugs including birth con-

trol pills, injections, patches, and rings. Other effective measures include the hormone treatments Lupron, Depo-Provera, Danazol, and Gonadotropin-releasing hormone (Gn-RH) agonists and antagonists.

If drugs to treat endometriosis don't work, the next strategy is usually surgery, which can range from the conservative (cauterizing, cutting, lasering, or scraping away excess tissue) to the radical (removing the ovaries and/or having a hysterectomy, which is what Bastian eventually opted to get).

Alternative remedies also abound, and include tai chi, acupuncture, chiropractic, meditation, relaxation techniques yoga, reducing sugar consumption, and taking extra vitamin C and E.

In the future, health advocates hope to introduce treatments that are now in development: aromatase inhibitors, estrogen receptor beta agonists, selective progesterone receptor modulators, and angiogenesis inhibitors.

"We'll need better funding to make these cures available," says Ballweg. "And during Endometriosis Awareness Month, we hope more financial support will flow in." 🌸

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For more information:

Endometriosis Association
www.endometriosisassn.org

National Institutes of Health:
"Endometriosis"

www.nichd.nih.gov/publications/pubs/endometriosis

It seems all pervasive in our culture. We see it everywhere and in a variety of forms and degrees.

We read about it in the newspaper and hear the reports on the television. Bullying is a growing problem in educational institutions from kindergarten to graduate school. People are harassed by their neighbors or coworkers. Participants on talk shows shout at each other and call one another names. Politicians accuse their opponents of selfish motives and belittle

their ideas and proposals. People of faith threaten to destroy the sacred writings of others. Even Christians find fault with one another and separate themselves when they disagree about theology and practice. The judgmental spirit is alive and well in the land.

That spirit is not only thriving out there. It also threatens to take up residence in our own hearts and to find expression in our words and actions. We may not go to the extremes we encounter in the news, but



JUDGE Not

by E. Louise Williams

our thoughts betray us as do our conversations with those closest to us. Listen in:

• The checker at the grocery store is taking far too much time chatting with the person in the front of the line.

• The president of the condo association doesn't know the first thing about running a meeting.

• Those parents could do a better job of controlling their children.

• People who file for divorce are just not trying hard enough to make their marriage work.

• Why is she paying for her groceries with food stamps when she looks like she is able-bodied enough to get a job?

• Their lawn is an eye-sore.

➤ We'd all be better off if the gays and lesbians would just keep quiet and control their desires.

➤ She doesn't know how to behave in a group, and I wish she would quit coming to our Bible study.

➤ You would think he would learn how we do things around here before he starts talking about change.

➤ I don't know why kids have to have all those tattoos and body piercings.

➤ They shouldn't let old people drive. They are so slow.

➤ She has just let herself go. She is so overweight!

Have you ever heard these statements? Have you ever said them yourself?

From the beginning

Usually behind our judgments of other people is a value, conscious or unconscious, about how people are to be and to behave. Some of our values have just been absorbed from our environment. (Looking good is good.) Some, our parents have taught us intentionally or unintentionally. (Cleanliness is next to godliness.) Others have come to us as part of our education at school or church. (Good behavior is God-pleasing.) We have learned still others from our experiences. (You have to work hard to get ahead.)

When someone doesn't fit in to our value system, we may judge

them as somehow inferior. We may talk to others about them, distance ourselves from them, marginalize them, try to change them, or even seek to get rid of them.

How did we come to this? The short answer is *sin*.

It's nothing new. We can see the beginnings of this judgmental spirit in the stories of creation and fall in the first chapters of Genesis. Adam and Eve, we are told, are created in the image of God. They are made from the ground, the stuff of the rest of creation, but having the divine breath breathed into them. The creator gives them all that they need, and they are to be caretakers of the creation, all of which they receive as good from God. They live in right relationship with God, with each other, and with all of creation. Still they are creatures and not God. Only God has wisdom, knowledge. They have a limit. They are not to eat of the garden's tree of knowledge of good and evil.

Into this harmonious setting enters the tempter, the serpent, who comes with a most attractive proposition. "If you eat of the fruit of this tree, you will become like God, knowing good and evil." They fall for it. They are not satisfied with being creatures in the image of God. They want to be like God. They cross the line and get what they wanted. Now instead of receiving what God gives as good, they



are relegated to a life of having to judge for themselves what is good and what is evil.

Now they are making judgments about God, about each other and about themselves. We see the consequences—shame, fear, blaming, hiding. They cannot stand to be exposed, because then they will be judged. They sew fig leaves together to cover themselves, and they hide in the bushes.

They blame each other. . . and they blame God.

The judgmental spirit has arrived. We can trace its history though the Scripture. It is especially embodied in the gospels in the Pharisees. Respected religious leaders, they wore fig leaves tightly tailored from their careful observance of all the laws. Clearly so many people did not measure up.

Pharisees passed judgment on Jesus who gave them lots of reason—from welcoming sinners and eating with them, to healing on the Sabbath, to fraternizing with women. They readily found reason to judge others: “I thank you, God, that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even this tax collector.”

That same judgmental spirit takes shape in us also.

What’s your role?

Sometimes the judgmental spirit rises up when we feel satisfied

with the way we have put our “fig leaves” together. We have covered all our bases, and we take delight in pointing out the weaknesses we see in others.

Sometimes our judging of others is a way to divert attention from ourselves because we suspect that our “fig leaves” are not covering us very well. We are unsure of ourselves, and so we try to look good by pointing out someone else’s shortcomings.

Perhaps the most destructive judgments of all are those we pronounce on ourselves when we fail to measure up or to live by our own values or God’s.

Always our judgmentalism is usurping the role that is God’s alone. But when we operate out of a judgmental spirit, we miss what God is really doing. Like the elder brother in Jesus’ story of the prodigal son, we find ourselves outside while the party is going on inside as the father welcomes the lost son home. Again and again Jesus, in word and deed, makes it clear that God’s work is not judgment or condemnation but forgiveness, reconciliation, love and grace. In calling us to be disciples, Jesus invites us into that work which is impossible when we operate out of a judgmental spirit.

Mostly we don’t intend to be judgmental. We don’t really want to be that way. In our hearts we know

that is not the way God calls us to be. Since Adam and Eve, being judgmental seems to be our default position whenever we feel ashamed or afraid.

What can help us change? What can change our judgmental heart into a heart of love?

Making a change

Such change is God’s work. God makes us a new creation in the waters of baptism. God pronounces us precious, much loved daughter or son—and once again calls this new creation very good and in right relationship. In baptism, St. Paul, reminds us that to be baptized is to be clothed with Christ (Galatians 3:26). We no longer have to depend on our fig leaves. God gives us a much better covering—Jesus Christ. Now when God looks at us, God sees Jesus Christ. And we have the possibility of seeing ourselves and others also as clothed with Jesus Christ. That is all pure *gift*—God’s grace and love. In our baptism, we are invited and enabled to see ourselves and others with God’s loving, graceful eyes.

Second, we know that there are things that we can do to more fully appreciate, enjoy, and utilize God’s gift. The things we do don’t earn the gift. We might say that the things we do help *unwrap* the gift. Those things we do are sometimes called spiritual disciplines or practices.

In her book *Soul Feast*, Marjorie Thompson writes, “Spiritual disciplines are like garden tools. The best spade and hoe in the world cannot guarantee a good crop. They only make it more likely that growth will be unobstructed.” The tools don’t cause the seeds to sprout, and the tools don’t produce the fruit. Tools, though, can break up the soil, clear away debris, and bring water and fertilizer.

Spiritual discipline can help keep the soil of our lives receptive and responsive to the working of God’s spirit in us and around us. It is God—and not our disciplines—who effects change in us.

The following disciplines might be good tools to help prepare the way for God to change our hearts to become less judgmental and more loving, especially for Lent.

Remembering our baptism.

Much of our judgmentalism grows from a lack of trust in God’s grace—for ourselves and others. A daily remembrance of baptism can help root us in God’s grace—that is, God’s amazing love for us no matter what we have done or how far we have wandered away.

Some people remember their baptism by making the sign of the cross and saying, “I am baptized.” Others find it helpful to remember their baptism each time they wash their face or take a shower. Still

others put a note on their mirror or program a message on their computer screen to remind them that God loves them just as they are.

Fasting. For a period of time, perhaps during the season of Lent, we might try fasting from judgmental words. Keeping silent whenever judgmental thoughts arise may help us become more conscious of what triggers our judgmental attitudes, and if we don’t speak judgmental words, we don’t pull others into the same judgmental spirit.

Compassion. The Hebrew word for *compassion* shares the same root as the word for *womb*. We might say that compassion is womb-love. To practice this discipline is to see every other person as one who is born from the same womb as we are. To view another with compassionate eyes is to look for the family resemblance, to see how we are alike rather than to look for what makes us different.

Hospitality. The spiritual practice of hospitality is to make room for others, to give them space to be themselves. Where a judgmental spirit distances one person from another, hospitality invites the other person to come closer, to be at home in our space.

Hospitality does not seek to change them but rather welcomes

them as they are. This discipline may mean welcoming people into our homes or our congregations. It may mean receiving people into our awareness. It may also mean a kind of hospitality of heart that seeks to be accepting and non-judgmental.

Reviewing the Progress

With each of these disciplines, a time of review at the end of the day or week may be helpful. Keeping a journal of how your disciplines are going might also be useful. Write down what you have learned, where you have failed or succeeded, and what changes are happening in you. Some people find it especially fruitful to involve someone else in their practices—a family member, a trusted friend, a spiritual director, or a group to which you belong. Those others can give you feedback and encouragement.

Remember to be gentle with yourself in these disciplines and practices. They are only tools to be used to open yourself more and more to God’s amazing grace. It is that grace that will transform us into more graceful people. 🌿

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Loving Relationships

by Linda Johnson Seyenkulo and Jensen Seyenkulo

WORSHIP RESOURCES

ELW Evangelical Lutheran Worship (*also known as the red book*)

LBW Lutheran Book of Worship (*also known as the green book*)

WOV With One Voice (*also known as the blue book*)

TFF This Far By Faith (*also known as the African American hymnal*)

LLC Libro de Liturgia y Cántico (*also known as the Latino hymnal*)

W&P Worship and Praise (*also known as the contemporary hymnal*)

Can two walk together, except they be agreed?

Amos 3:3 (KJV)

THEME VERSE

"Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" He said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. That is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" Matthew 22:36–39

MAIN TEXT

Matthew 22:34–40

OPENING

See devotional reading on p. 27.

Guidelines and Discussion Method for our Time Together

To facilitate the discussion, we are going to adapt the rules for engagement and the invitation method of discussion, both of which are printed in their entirety in the September 2010 issue and are available online at www.lutheranwomantoday.org. If possible, keep a copy of them with your study materials so they are always handy during your time together.

INTRODUCTION

The greatest commandment, according to Jesus, is to love the Lord your God. Then Jesus goes on to say the second greatest commandment is like the first, as in *equally important* to the first. The second is to love your neighbor as yourself.

We are going to spend this Bible study session thinking about what it means to love your neighbor as yourself. What does it mean for us as people of God? Because, you see, Jesus does not say, love your neighbor who thinks politically like you do or votes the way you do. Jesus does not say love your neighbor who likes the same liturgy or even belongs to the same denomination you do. Jesus does not say love only your neighbor who is Christian. Jesus does not say love your neighbor who loves others the way you do. Jesus does not say love the neighbor who has the same kind of family you do. Jesus says to love the neighbor as yourself.

The discussions in our church on any number of issues at first glance seem to be about issues of biblical interpretation or how we read the Bible. For many of us, this first glance is not only where we start, it is where we stay.

What would it be like if we thought about biblical interpretation and put it in the context of Jesus' words about the second commandment—loving the

neighbor as being as great as the first commandment about loving God? In other words, as we think about things such as other world religions, about human sexuality, about the role of women in the church, about any number of political positions on issues facing our world, what would it look like to put love first and judgment second? We will be doing this session of our Bible study in this context: Jesus calls us to love the Lord our God with all our heart and soul and mind—and our neighbor as ourselves. (See “Freedom for Love,” p. 16.)

DEVOTIONAL READING

The devotional reading practice we will use for this Bible study session is called **T.R.I.P.** The letters TRIP stand for the following concepts in Bible study:

Thanks: What in these verses makes me thankful?

Regret or confession: What in these verses cause me regret?

Intercession or prayer: What do these texts lead me to pray for?

Plan of Action or purpose: What action do these texts encourage me to take today?

READ AMOS 3:3 AND MATTHEW 22:36–39 TOGETHER.

In order to think about the connection between these verses, ask yourself the questions that follow the letter of **T.R.I.P.** End with a moment of silent prayer, followed by a song.

SONG (Select one)

“All Are Welcome” *ELW* 641

“We are Called” *ELW* 720, *W&P* 147

PRAYER

God of all creation, we gather together today and we praise you for the wonders of creation and most

especially for the gift of relationship with other people. Open our eyes to see others with your eyes. Help us to love first and to move very, very slowly to judgment. Remind us of your love for us and for others. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

OVERVIEW

The song said, “What the world needs now is love, sweet love....” As Christians in community, we are called to love the other, no matter what. This section will look at what makes for loving relationships. Are loving relationships between God’s people possible in the midst of diversity? This section will discuss through word and study and song, the role of love in Christian community. (See “You Gotta Love ‘Em,” p. 12.)

GATHERING TIME

Speak a word of encouragement and love you heard once when you were not expecting it. Briefly describe that incident. What was your response?

HISTORICAL READING

The context for Matthew 22:34–40 is a group of encounters between Jesus and the religious leaders of the Jewish people. He is in the midst of several discussions with the Pharisees and the Scribes, two groups of religious leaders. (See side bar on p. 28.)

The discussions in Matthew 22:15–33 are challenging Jesus to try to trip him up. It seems the question in verse 36 is a bit different. The Pharisees, who were keepers and teachers of the law, were trying to find out what Jesus knew about the law. The *Lutheran Study Bible* (p. 1644) points out that the answer Jesus gives is also in Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18. Most likely Jesus had learned this as a Jewish child.

The writer of this gospel was writing to Jewish Christians. Much of what is in Matthew helps the Jewish Christians think about the connections and differ-

ences for their Jewish background and their Christian faith. At this time in Christian history, there were still discussions about whether or not you had to keep Jewish law and customs in order to be truly Christian.

The Greek language of the New Testament had several words for the word *love*. In English, we have one word which we express strong emotional ties. We use the word love, the very same word, to talk about a food that we love as well as the love we have for our partner or spouse or our children. We can love a movie or a song or a person. The emphasis we put on the word can change its meaning some, for example “I love you” may carry a different meaning than “I love that.” The Greek language of the Bible had several different words for love, all of which described a certain kind of love. The words were *philia*, *eros*, *storge*, and *agape*.

THE KINDS OF LOVE LISTED IN THE BIBLE

Philia is love between friends

Eros is the sense of being in love, sexual love

Storge is affection, love of family

Agape is unconditional love

Jesus used the Greek word *agape* to describe the way we are to love God and the way we are to love our neighbor. *Agape* means unconditional love and is the kind of love that God has for us. Most of the verses about love in the New Testament use the word *agape*.

Let's look at a few verses that refer to love and specifically the love we are to have for others. What do those passages teach us about what it means to love God and to love others?

READ

MATTHEW 22:36–40

JOHN 13:34–35

1 CORINTHIANS 13:1–7

COLOSSIANS 3:12–14

1. If you were living in the time of Jesus, in a time when there were many religions and types of lifestyles around you, what would the words you just read say to you about the relationships you would have with friends and neighbors? (Remember that during the time some of these books were written, many Christians were still trying to sort out if they also had to follow the law, which included staying away from people who were considered unclean—anyone who was not Jewish.)

SCRIBE

1. a person who serves as a professional copyist, especially one who made copies of manuscripts before the invention of printing.
2. a public clerk or writer, usually one having official status.
3. Also called *sopher*, *sofer*. Judaism. One of the group of Palestinian scholars and teachers of Jewish law and tradition, active from the 5th century B.C. to the 1st century A.D., who transcribed, edited, and interpreted the Bible.
4. a writer or author, especially a journalist.

PHAR-I-SEE

1. a member of a Jewish sect that flourished during the 1st century B.C. and 1st century A.D. and that differed from the Sadducees chiefly in its strict observance of religious ceremonies and practices, adherence to oral laws and traditions, and belief in an afterlife and the coming of a Messiah.
2. (*lowercase*) a sanctimonious, self-righteous, or hypocritical person.

2. Think about your current community. Are there people you find difficult to love because of their lifestyle, their values, and/or their customs? Who are they? What does the Bible passage you just read say about your relationship with them?
3. The Greek word for love in your passage is *agape*, which is the word used to talk about the unconditional love God has for God's people. What pops into your mind as you think about that kind of love in the context of what you just read?

LUTHERAN THEOLOGICAL READING

Law and Gospel

A Lutheran reading of the Bible is rooted in the idea of law and gospel. The law being that which convicts us or keeps us going the right way, and the gospel being the good news that comes to us from the text.

In groups of two, read through Matthew 22:36–39 together. Share with each other what part of those verses speaks law, and what law do you hear. Now share the good news you hear. Are both law and gospel present?

Other Sources

As Lutherans, we consider the Bible central to our faith, a spring of knowledge about God and the ways of God. Lutherans value the Bible's guidance on how to live as Christian community and as individual believers. There are varieties of ways that we read and interpret the Bible. Members of the same worshipping community can read the same things and interpret them differently. One of the ways that we grow is by staying connected in the body of Christ as we encounter differing viewpoints on a host of issues. There are so many things to look at, but let's take three of the most volatile, at least for people in our church. They are politics, sexuality, and religion.

Time out. This is a good spot to take a quick comfort check. How is everyone doing? It could be about now that someone is saying, "That's it, I'm out of here!" We're hoping you stay connected and practice some of the ways we have been presenting about staying in touch and being able to hear and listen to other viewpoints.

We have searched the Scripture and have never found that it says Jesus came to make us comfortable. We like to think Jesus came to bring about a new way of doing things, a way that runs counter to the current culture and way of being, a way that stays engaged because what we have in common with each other is that *agape* love. That is the hard thing about Christian community; we are called to stay in relationship with each other even when we disagree with each other.

Remember that we are talking about relationship, loving relationships, in this Bible study. We invite you to put aside the walls that may have just gone up for you and encourage you to stay in relationship with this study as we hear a variety of voices, some that are with you and some we are bringing in from other places.

There are differences of opinion in our church on many things. In the ELCA, the spectrum of views goes from (for lack of better words) very conservative to very liberal and everything those labels bring with them.

One that has received much attention lately has been the role of gay and lesbian folks in our church. In our discussion for this month's Bible study, we are inviting you to go online and see what you can find about the diversity of opinion in the Christian churches about sexuality and sexual orientation. Keep in mind as you read them, that those diverse opinions are present at the same time in many ELCA congregations. In fact, you may have heard others express their opinions about this and

other issues. Usually those opinions are expressed in like-minded groups. What would it be like to have those opinions standing next to each other? What would it look like to share those opposing opinions? Would it modify the dialogue? Would there be more care taken in the discussion? What do you think? (See "Judge Not," p. 22.)

Again, the focus of this discussion is how we stay in dialogue with each other when we feel differently about things.

CLOSING

Many of us have people in our families who are very different from us.

Some of us make those relationships work by never talking about the issues on which we differ. An example of this would be life-long friends who have never talked about the fact that they belong to different political parties.

Some of us deal with those issues with humor. One of our Lutheran friends had really good Jewish friends. One year, they spent Passover together. The Lutheran was assigned to bring the hardboiled eggs for the Passover dinner. He showed up with a covered basket full of hard-boiled eggs. When they un-wrapped the basket, they all started laughing. He had very carefully written on each egg, "He Is Risen!" (Note: do not try this with people you do not know well!)

Some of us cut-off (or sever) relational ties in families. That is painful. It is also very painful in the church. Cut-off only results in people going away from each other. One gay friend talked about singing in a gay men's chorus. He said, "Most of these guys have no relationship with their families."

4. In your community, what are the ways most people deal with difference?

5. How does that work to move people towards loving relationships?

As we close this session, hear the words of Rita Nakashima Brock, a Japanese American, who writes a chapter called "The Greening of the Soul: A Feminist Paradigm of the Web of Life" in the book *Setting the Table: Women in Theological Conversation*. In writing about Christian community, she says, "Our tendency to set up opposites teaches us to think in terms of conflict and to fear differences in others because their unlikeness threatens our identity—as if knowing who we are requires us to set up fences around ourselves. We are led to believe that if loving them makes us too like them, our loving takes something away from us rather than enlarging us...."

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT AFTER THE SESSION

What is one way you can work to improve relationships with people who think differently than you do?

PRAYER

Dear God, you who have created all of us, who have given us minds and faith, hear our prayers on this day. Open our hearts and minds to learn from those with whom we disagree. Help us to keep our mouths closed and our ears open as we listen to them and to their stories of life and of faith. Move us from the arrogance of thinking we always have the right position and that our position is always your position.

Help us to know, deep within ourselves that we are yours and that being yours allows us to open ourselves to possibilities and ideas we would not have sought on our own. And now, lead and guide us as we live our lives, based on the commandments

of loving the Lord our God with all our heart, and with all our soul, and with all our mind and our neighbor as our self." Amen.

LONG

What Wondrous Love is This" *ELW* 803, *LBW* 385

LOOKING AHEAD

Easter is coming and we will celebrate the resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Yet many people

live with things in their lives that keep them from fully experiencing the life giving presence of the resurrected Jesus with them. In the next session we will look at barriers to resurrection life. ☙

The Rev. Linda Johnson Seyenkulo, M.S., and the Rev. Jensen Seyenkulo, Ph.D., live in the Chicago area. Linda is pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church in Park Forest, Ill., and Jensen is former director for rostered and authorized leadership in the ELCA Vocation and Education unit.



Connect with the young women in your life.



boldcafe.org

Read. Connect. Grow.

Café is a free, monthly online magazine for young women offered by Women of the ELCA. Visit www.boldcafe.org and subscribe to receive e-mail alerts for new issues. Also available as a podcast.

Women of the **ELCA** ☙

CHOCOLATE-COVERED Networking



Jenna Pulkowski and her young friends were puzzled, yet pleased, when they attended a new event sponsored by Women of the ELCA.

Lutheran women in their 20s and 30s gathered at a Chicago bar overlooking the city last September to attend a chocolaty networking event sponsored by *Café* (www.boldcafe.org), the electronic magazine for young women produced by Women of the ELCA.

"A lot of my friends who are here tonight were born and raised in the ELCA. [But they] were really confused about why Women of the ELCA was holding an event for young women who were 20-something,"

Pulkowski, a student at Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago, said of the chocolate lounge event.

"The chocolate lounge was such a successful networking event for young women at the triennial

gathering in Salt Lake City (2008) that we decided to try it locally," said Elizabeth McBride, director for intergenerational programs and editor of *Café*. "We are trying to get the word out that Women of the ELCA is for all ages."

The chocolate desserts were donated by the ELCA's young adult ministries area. Two additional events were held in December and January.

Each woman attending the chocolate lounge received a candle from Bright Endeavors (www.brightendeavors.org), a nonprofit organization that helps inner-city, home-





ss, and at-risk young women age 16 to 25 gain skills in becoming self-sufficient adults. Women of the ELCA gave a grant to Bright Endeavors in 2009, and representatives were on hand to talk about the organization and sell candles.

Who met at the lounge?

The chocolate lounge networking event allows Women of the ELCA to reach an audience not connected to the woman's organization or a church, McBride said.

Many of the 26 young women who attended the Chicago event were not participants of Women of the ELCA units—or even members of a congregation—but all described

themselves as Lutheran, she said.

And each had different ideas about Women of the ELCA.

Pulkowski said she thought of Women of the ELCA participants as “the wonderful grandmothers of our church, the mothers and aunts,” the fundraisers and quiltmakers—

not younger women like herself.

“But Women of the ELCA is so much more than that,” she acknowledged. “And this event tonight is a really good opportunity for [younger women] to network and connect with one another.” 🌸

HOLD YOUR OWN CHOCOLATE LOUNGE

Are you interested in sharing with young women about your Women of the ELCA group? Is your unit engaged in ministry in the community? Are there young moms who might appreciate meeting others with small children? There are many ways to involve young women in your active unit. **Learn more at www.womenoftheelca.org.**

Our Calling in Education by Kaari M. Reiersen

WHAT DOES GOD HAVE TO DO WITH EDUCATION?

- ✧ The Lutheran Legacy
- ✧ The God Who Calls Us
- ✧ Our Calling in Education Today

WHAT FAITH WILL OUR CHILDREN HAVE?

- ✧ Faith Formation from Generation to Generation
- ✧ Lifelong Learning
- ✧ “Let the little children come to me”
- ✧ A Mutual Environment of Living the Faith
- ✧ Equipping Faithful and Discerning Students
- ✧ Guidelines for the Ministry of Faith Formation

WILL ALL CHILDREN AND YOUTH HAVE ACCESS TO HIGH-QUALITY EDUCATION?

- ✧ Schools for All
- ✧ The Commitment to Public Schools
- ✧ Expectations for Public Schools
- ✧ Expectations of this Church
- ✧ Equitable Access to High-quality Education for All
- ✧ Evaluating Educational Reforms
- ✧ Moving Toward Equitable Access
- ✧ Counsel to Parents

WILL OUR CHURCH HAVE SCHOOLS & COLLEGES? WILL OUR SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES HAVE A CHURCH?

- ✧ The Commitment to Lutheran Educational Institutions
- ✧ Lutheran Schools and Centers
- ✧ Lutheran Colleges and Universities
- ✧ Supporting Lifelong Learning

WILL PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION SERVE THE COMMON GOOD?

- ✧ Expectations for Public Universities and Colleges
- ✧ The Commitment to Public Higher Education
- ✧ This Church’s Presence and Campus Ministry
- ✧ Will Students Have Access to Higher Education
- ✧ Living Our Calling

The statement can be downloaded for free from www.elca.org/social statements in English or Spanish. A complimentary printed copy can be requested by calling 800-638-3522; multiple copies can be ordered there for a small fee as well (ITEM001504).

Lutherans have a long and storied history in the field of education, from Martin Luther advocating for the education of females to the extensive network of church-related colleges and universities connected to the ELCA. It is not

surprising that the ELCA should have written a social statement on education—it is only surprising that it was not among the first. *Our Calling in Education* was adopted by more than a two-thirds vote at the 2007 churchwide assembly.

The statement begins with a prologue entitled “Education and Vocation,” in which the concept of *vocation* is introduced—it is at the center of this social statement. Our baptismal vocation urges us to find a place in the world to serve God

Editor's note: This is the last in a series of 10 ELCA social statements that Lutheran Woman Today has highlighted over the past year. The social statements are social teaching and policy documents, adopted since 1991 by a churchwide assembly in accordance with ELCA policies and procedures. Social statements require a two-thirds majority vote.

through particular callings. Our places or callings in the world are as teachers, farmers, bankers, factory workers, and parents, and we serve God by doing the best for others in carrying out these non-church roles we live in.

According to the statement, the Christian role in education is “to educate people in the Christian faith for their vocation and to strive with others to ensure that all have access to high-quality education that develops personal gifts and abilities and serves the common good. This calling embraces all people in both church and society.”

The prologue identifies contemporary issues in education like faith formation, equitable access, public education, and support for ELCA institutions that include colleges and ministries related to education (for example, campus).

The statement defines education broadly, as referring to “learning, teaching, and knowing as a dimension of human life.” We are created to learn to know God. As Lutherans, from our heritage we understand that education equips us for our God-given callings in the world. The statement stresses that Lutherans in North America have

historically given great attention to education.

THREE MOVEMENTS

Our Calling in Education contains a creedal statement about vocation and education as a dimension of life that takes shape in three movements. The first section refers to God the creator. We see that creation is ongoing, and that education, which supports human dignity, is part of creation. Creation is, at the same time fallen, and education is necessary for civic righteousness, to preserve the good of creation.

The second section, centered on Jesus Christ, reminds us that we are educated to serve the neighbor, not as a matter of personal salvation or for our own personal advancement. It also reminds us that we follow a savior who was a teacher.

The last section deals with how God calls us through the Holy Spirit—calls the church to education for the vocation given in baptism. We are dependent upon the Holy Spirit to form us and produce the fruit of the spirit. This section also calls us to balance church and secular education.

After this explication of what God has to do with education, the

rest of the statement is structured by four questions that explore basic challenges for the church. Each section is headed by one of these questions and then provides the ELCA’s best insights about how to live out commitment to education for people today.

The statement challenges congregations to consider themselves allies of the public schools.

IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

The statement raises the critical question, “What Faith Will our Children Have?” and then devotes itself to concerns about the faith formation of children. It affirms that faith formation through education is lifelong and intergenerational. Children themselves—both sinful and moral even as children—are a gift in need of caring guidance

that nurtures them in faith, not just knowledge about the world.

In the tasks of forming children, parents need support from the congregation. The statement also speaks of the church's power and responsibility to equip faithful and discerning youth and young adult students. This section concludes by offering guidelines for the ministry of faith formation.

The need for access to high-quality education for all is a serious concern for this church and this society, and the third section addresses this question. The subsection "schools for all" provides a list of purposes for schools and articulates the ELCA's commitment to the concept of public schools and the work they do.

Among the expectations of public schools would be that schools teach civil righteousness to their students, and that schools teach *about* religion as part of the search for knowledge. Schools should also teach the best current knowledge in science, history, economics, and so forth. The statement challenges congregations to consider themselves allies of the public schools.

The commitment to public schools brings with it a concern that all people should have equitable access to a high quality education as a consequence of their equal worth and dignity. This has not been accomplished, and the statement

recommends some standards to evaluate educational reform in the subsection "Evaluating Educational Reforms." It also sets forth goal such as countering the negative effects of poverty and discrimination, equity in funding, school choice, accountability, and improving educational quality, that need to be addressed if society is to provide true equitable access. The statement offers broad direction on each of these goals while not specifying the particular means to achieve them.

Moving from elementary to higher education, the next section discusses the relations between the ELCA and its schools and colleges. It lists expectations of the ELCA and of the schools, as well as expectations of ELCA colleges and universities.

FOR THE GOOD OF ALL

The last question the statement considers is whether public higher education will serve the common good. Just as primary and secondary education, public universities and colleges are expected to serve the common good. The commitment to public higher education includes honoring community and technical colleges and fostering free inquiry, that is, not seeking to restrict knowledge.

Studying people and cultures formerly ignored and commending the humanities, arts, and social

sciences are also mentioned in this section.

The matter of campus ministries at public colleges and universities receives considerable attention in a section of its own. Campus ministries live in the tension of addressing controversy but are also places of welcome. They are expected to be primarily places that preach the gospel and administer the sacraments. The lack of financial support from the ELCA is noted in this section.

In this last section, the question of access is raised again, but with respect to higher education. The ever-increasing costs of education limit access and deter completion of degrees for many students. The statement urges the church towards advocacy to support funding for higher education, especially for minority and low-income students.

Returning to the central idea of vocation, the statement's conclusion leaves each of us with a challenge: "May we faithfully and boldly be a teaching and learning church, educating in the faith for vocation and striving with others so that all people have equitable access to a high quality education." 🌿

The Rev. Kaari M. Reiersen is former editor of the *Journal of Lutheran Ethics* and former associate director for studies in ELCA Church in Society.



WE RECOMMEND

Resources for action, advocacy, programs, or further study

Compiled from sources including the ELCA News Service, Seeds for the Parish, and www.elca.org

Find wholeness and peace

The Faces of Grief is a new three-session resource designed to help you find wholeness and peace after loss. Written by Sonia Solomonson, a life coach, the resource is offered free from Women of the ELCA. Loss comes in many forms: miscarriage, trauma, natural disaster, death, foreclosure, to name just a few. Discover your own grieving process, explore how grief can transform you, learn to feel the feelings of grief. *The Faces of Grief* is filled with questions for reflection, discussion, or journaling. Download your copy at www.womenofthelca.org.

Bold women; bold book

Like you and like Katie Luther, Catherine of Sienna was a bold woman of faith. A mystic, saint, reformer, and teacher, she lived and worked for justice in the late 14th century. During a time when many women could be found in the kitchen, this uneducated daughter of a cloth dyer, was involved in political, social, and spiritual activism. She also campaigned for peace among groups at war in Tuscany.

You can learn more about this bold crusader who died so young from the BlueBridge published book, *Catherine of Siena: A Passionate Life* by Don Brophy.

Sister Joan Chittister reviews the book as “a masterpiece of content and context—a rare combination that makes a woman of the past a model for our own times.

Find the book at www.amazon.com or at your local bookseller.

Find out how to lead a Bible study

Are you intrigued by the idea of leading a Bible study? Or would prefer to run for the hills if someone asks you to help?

Whether you are a confident, experienced leader or less enthusiastic about the idea, Women of the ELCA’s new free resource, “How to Lead a Bible Study,” will offer some practical suggestions and will motivate and inspire you to claim—or reclaim—your role in building up the body of Christ through teaching.

Download your free copy from www.womenofthelca.org.

What can you learn by baking bread?

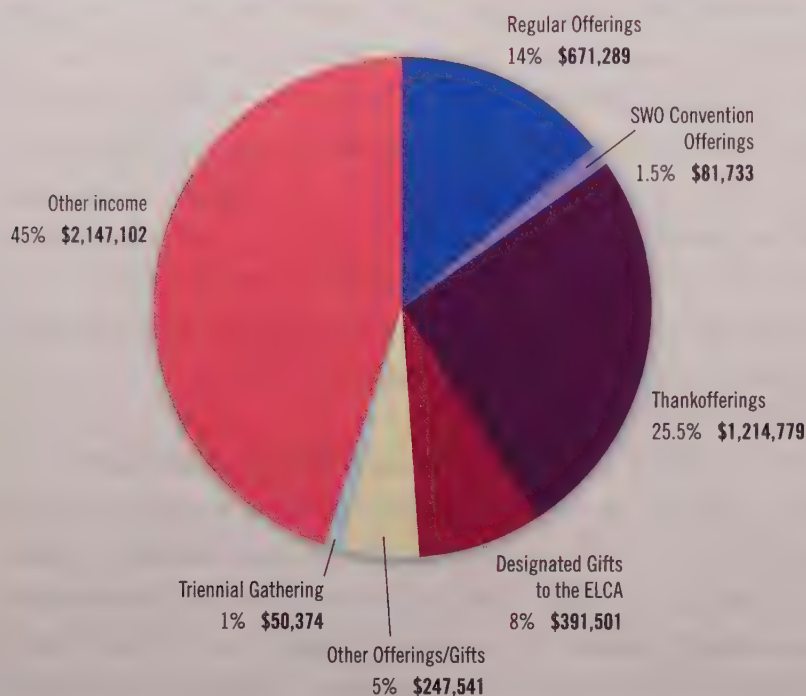
Spend time reflecting on the phrase “Give us this day our daily bread” by downloading a new Women of the ELCA resource, “Living a Life of Daily Bread.” The four-page reflection explores what you can learn by baking bread: patience, community, how to be intentional and attentive, and the joy that comes from wide-eyed anticipation.

This resource can be used either for personal reflection or with a group. Since bread-making is a lost art, you could use this as an opportunity for intergenerational sharing of skills and recipes.

Find the free resource at www.womenofthelca.org.

“Give us this day our daily bread” was also the theme of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) assembly, held in Stuttgart, Germany, last summer. Other resources on the theme, including LWF Bible studies, articles, and stories, are available at www.lwf-assembly.org.

2009 REVENUE



Offerings	2009
Regular Offerings	\$671,289
Thankofferings	1,214,779
Designated Gifts to the ELCA	391,501
SWO Convention Offerings	81,733
Other Offerings / Gifts	247,541
Triennial Gathering	50,374
Other Income (endowments, bequests, miscellaneous, interest income*)	2,147,102

2009 EXPENSES



Expenses	2009
Programs	\$780,353
Communication	632,466
Operations	853,659
Governance	182,154
Triennial Gathering	3,075
Designated Gifts to the ELCA	391,501

*Please note that our "Other Income" category is high due to a rebound in our investments after suffering significant losses in 2008. This category also includes sizeable bequest income received in 2009, most of which was placed in reserve and in board-designated funds.

the mission and ministry of Women of the ELCA are grounded in the loving and transforming love of God in Jesus Christ. Because of that grounding, our mission and ministry can change lives. We know that graphs and charts and numbers can barely describe those transformations, but here is our best effort.

As the pie chart labeled "2009 revenue" shows, the churchwide organization receives nearly all of its regular annual income from two sources: (1) regular offerings that come from congregational units through their synodical organizations and (2) Thankofferings that come directly from congregational units to the churchwide organization. Synodical convention offerings and designated gifts make up much of the remaining revenue, along with gifts of those who have provided for the organization in their wills (other income).

In 2009, the churchwide organization received two significant state gifts, totaling approximately \$300,000. The executive board placed much of this income in reserve and board-designated funds.

Two scholarship funds received approximately \$50,000, including the Chilstrom fund that supports women in seminary. Approximately \$100,000 went into the Katharina von Bora Luther Fund (Katie's fund). The executive board looked to the future of the organization by

devoting approximately \$100,000 to a fund for planned giving, and \$400,000 was placed in a reserve fund. A smaller amount was designated for marketing research for *Lutheran Woman Today* magazine and finally, a tithe to the annual operating budget through a Thankoffering (approximately \$80,000).

Gifts to this organization have enabled the churchwide expression of Women of the ELCA to support you and your ministries in a variety of ways: programs, communication, operations, and governance. The programs area covers our anti-racism and cross-cultural efforts, evangelism, global education, new program resources, stewardship, and the administrative work of the grants and scholarships committees. This figure includes also the salaries and benefits of the staff who carry out this work.

In the communication area there's editing, graphic design, printing, mailing, resource services, our extensive Web site, including social media efforts, the *Interchange* newsletter, *Bold Connections* newsletter, the e-zine *Café* and administrative costs for *Lutheran Woman Today* magazine. This figure includes the salaries and benefits of the staff who carry out this work.


Operations (\$853,659) includes organizational development, the online newsletter *Threads*, costs such as the annual audit, equipment,

and purchased ELCA services. The operations figure includes the salaries and benefits of staff carrying out both operations and the governance work of the organization. This includes the meetings of the executive board, the travel of board members to synodical conventions, training for synodical treasurers, and the constitutionally required conference of synodical presidents.

Designated gifts (\$391,501) were gifts received in 2009 for particular funds or ministries, including Lutheran World Relief, World Hunger, Disaster Relief, and Missionary Sponsorship.

These gifts were passed *in total* to their designated area but because they were made *through* the women's organization, we can see the important impact of women's giving on ministries of the whole church!

Offerings are our primary source of financial support, and they all have their own purposes. It is amazing how the offerings that we give, when added together with those of other women across the United States and Caribbean, fuel the churchwide organization to support all of us in our ministries! Thank you!

For more information on stewardship and giving opportunities, visit www.womenoftheelca.org.  **Linda Post Bushkofsky** is executive director of Women of the ELCA.

Free resources: a click away!



Women of the ELCA offers easy-to-use

- hour-long programs
- multi-session programs
- longer programs ideal for retreat settings



*What women
are saying...*

"Thank you for these great study materials!"

"I gave copies to the women mentors in our congregation."

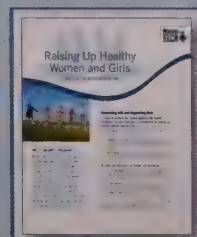
"I really like the ability to download a PDF file to either read or print out."

Over 30 women's ministry resources available to you free

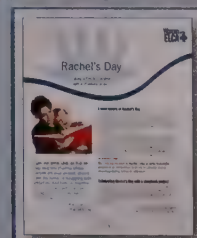
Simply download, print and photocopy for your next event. Each comes with a "how to use this resource" section that will help you be a confident leader. Many include bibliographies if you want to learn more.

Most are designed for group use, but many can be adapted for individual use too. They are perfect for adult forums, retreats, workshops and conventions.

Available at www.womenoftheelca.org



"I'm sharing this one with congregational youth and health ministries."



"This would be a good outreach program for our unit!"

Don't go on the Web much? Ask a younger woman or girl to help, or ask someone in your church office. It's good stewardship: printing the resources yourself allows your offerings to be used to create even more new resources.



RACE NOTES

The Great Commandment

by Linda Post Bushkofsky



I am a Baby Boomer, born in 1959. I share some of the common characteristics of that generation: I often define myself by my professional accomplishments; I'm independent and believe I can change the world; I'm achievement-oriented and competitive.

However, when it comes to technology, I embrace new technologies more like someone from younger generations. I wouldn't give up my iPhone, and I'm gaga about my iPad.

So it's no surprise that this month's column is presented with some assistance from Facebook, a social networking Web site where you can share information and photos with your friends and the friends of your friends.

When it came time to write this column, I had writer's block, and I turned to Women of the ELCA's Facebook page to invite women to help me out.

Since this month's Bible study focuses on the Great Commandment—"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind" (Matthew 22:36-39)—I asked, "what does the 'greatest and first commandment' mean for you?"

Here are some of the thoughtful responses women made to that question on Facebook.

For Stephanie Lewis of Shamokin Dam, Pa., "It means I am to love as I have been loved. Not as a feeling but as an action. And when I fail to do so, I can ask for forgiveness and guidance knowing I abide in a love that never fails or drifts away."

"Taking the time to share and serve, listen and encourage, review, reflect, and respond with others in dialog, discernment and discovery," says Barb Olson of Schaumburg, Ill.

Marlene Obie of Seattle, Wash., responded: "It's not what I do, but how I live, with love and respect for all creation—because that's where God is. I believe it's the only meaningful way we can praise and thank God, doing justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly with our God."

These are the words of Dorothy Nevils, president of the Indiana-Kentucky Synodical Women's Organization:

"As a part of this community of women, I find that love of God is the common thread. It is amazing how much love flows in that common space. We share each other's joys, difficulties, perspectives (even recipes and eye shadow)... so much that there is a oneness even when we are at odds. We are who we are together because of God's love, then [we] respond to others as witness to that love."

I couldn't have said it better! As you read the articles in this month's issue and engage in the Bible study, think about these two questions:

1. How is the Great Commandment lived out in the community of women in your congregation?
2. What would it mean for our church if we all began the day with a reminder of this commandment? 🌿

Linda Post Bushkofsky is executive director of Women of the ELCA.



AMEN!

Loving my Neighbor

by Catherine Malotky

I remember that I was

afraid. I had never been exposed to this way of being, homosexuality. It was new and strange. Strange, like a different language, or a very different climate with joys and dangers I do not know, or like the holiday traditions of a different family. I had no mental or emotional file folder to make sense of it.

I remember slowly learning more. I came to know people, some who were new to me, and some who were familiar. They were courageous enough to teach me, to reveal their lives and loves. Slowly, I could try on this idea, to see how their hopes and dreams were much like mine: a stable and loving family, a venue to contribute to the well-being of the world, joy in living and grace in dying.

I believe your creation is good, God. You have said so. Slowly, I came to believe what science says now, that this way of being is a matter of biology. I have heard stories from some who knew at a young age, some who are no better or worse than I am, whose hopes and dreams are much like mine. So I have come to apply my confession, God, that your creation is indeed good, and thus this must be no worse or better than my creation.

We have had to do this before, God. We have had to change our minds, to respect those whose skin is another color as equally human, to believe that women are as gifted outside the home as in, to see other cultures as worthy of honor alongside our own. You have made us all, glorious and sinful, a package deal.

I learned about hatred, and the danger that lurks behind our fears and prejudice. We have seen it before: raping, lynching, beating, ostracism, rejecting, excluding. Oh, God, we have seen it before, and we see it now, about this. Bullying is not reserved for children.

We have an opportunity. Because you command us to love our neighbors as ourselves, we can choose to welcome. We can choose to be a safe place for your children, the ones you have made good, particularly when the world around us is not as safe, not as welcoming. We can face our fears, and choose another way. As a church, we have.

Because we are the church, we can also support health in these relationships, as we do others. We have done this for heterosexual relationships for a long time. We can expect fidelity, monogamy, faithfulness. We can help with rituals and community that support commitment, so that more families can be loving and stable, because that's what we agree is good. And we can help when commitment wavers, and minister when families hurt.

God, you call us to love one another as ourselves. That means we will be changed. We will be asked to face our own prejudices and unwind them, so we can welcome differences. We have had to do this before. With your grace, we can do it again. In Jesus' name. Amen. 🌿

The Rev. Catherine Malotky is an ordained ELCA pastor. She has served in parish ministry and has also been an editor, teacher, and retreat leader.

HEALTHY ENDEAVORS

The junior and senior high youth group at Faith Lutheran Church, Grantsburg, Wis., helped the Women of the ELCA mission action group make health kits for Lutheran World Relief. Together the group collected materials for 90 health kits. Meanwhile, the quilters at Faith Lutheran make layettes, school kits, sewing kits and about 180 quilts every year for LWR.

Submitted by Sheila Odegard



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March 2011

TODAY